

# No Decency Left

By William Safire

WASHINGTON — A vicious attack by a 33-year-old Democratic lawyer, bedazzled by his moment in the limelight, upon the only witness to come before the Watergate committee with clean hands — an upright, respected, gentle human being of 59 named Richard Moore — is proof that the purpose of the Ervin committee is not to bring out the truth but to bring down the President.

Richard Moore, of all the men on the White House staff, comes closest to being a hero on the Watergate matter: when in March he had evidence that a crime was being covered up, he urged the man who knew most about it—John Dean—to go to the President and tell him all he knew. One reason Dean then did so, after nine months of duplicity, was the knowledge that if he did not immediately spill all he knew to the President, Richard Moore would go in with whatever he had.

So there was Moore, a man not "involved"; not seeking immunity; not the target of an investigation; a man of substance and lifelong good repute, and a witness to some crucial meetings between Mr. Dean and the President, coming before the Senate committee.

Moore had been told on Monday evening that he would be called to testify on the coming Thursday. He began preparing his testimony, but was interrupted the next day by Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, who wanted his information first and took most of the next day. That left Moore all day Wednesday to get ready for the Ervin committee, and he concentrated on the period central to the whole investigation — "what the President knew and when he knew it."

After a few hours' sleep Moore went to the committee; briefly, at lunchtime, committee lawyers went over the area of testimony to be covered that day, centering on the crucial March meetings with the President and Dean.

Then Moore's turn came. His prepared statement refuted John Dean's central conclusion that the President was aware of the cover-up. Moore said no; the first the President had known was on March 21, 1973, when Mr. Dean came clean.

Then young Terry Lenzner tore into him—not into the blockbuster testimony Mr. Moore had just given, nor on the matters about which Moore had properly been concentrating, but on some meetings that had taken place on another subject over a year ago.

## ESSAY

The line of questioning was a non sequitur; it had nothing to do with the matter at hand; in the language of football he "blindsided" the witness.

Moore was taken aback; Lenzner bored in with demands for dates and facts on an extraneous matter, effectively confusing and thereby discrediting the witness—after all, had not John Dean come equipped with every fact and date at his fingertips?

Next day, under questioning by others who wanted to find out what evidence he could contribute, Mr. Moore answered with some wit and the kind of occasionally precise recall that has an honest ring, and contrasts sharply with the carefully rehearsed stories of con men out to save their skins.

Because Moore did not lash into anybody, because his subsequent testimony showed he is a person not motivated by hatred, the unfairness of the attempted humiliation by Lenzner was underscored.

The thought must have occurred to many viewers of the two men in confrontation, who would be a better adviser to any President of the United States?

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Terry Lenzner, born to wealth, captain of the Harvard football team, protégé of Ramsey Clark and lawyer to the Rev. Philip Berrigan, is the essence of radical chic. He is a man on the make who strikes the pose of a stern guardian of civil liberties, but who has shown he has not the most rudimentary understanding of fairness and civility in human relationships.

Richard Moore, whom he sought to discredit, emerges from the hearings with dignity, good humor, and integrity intact. Viewers who do not automatically assume anybody connected with Mr. Nixon to be evil see Mr. Moore as the kind of man Presidents need to protect them from the gung-ho, ends-justify-the-means "team players" who flutter around the center of power.

The fury of the attack on a good man who did the right thing recalls the pivotal question asked by Joseph Welch, a man like Mr. Moore, at the Army-McCarthy hearings a generation ago: "Have you no decency left, sir?"

The Lenzner attack—which Senator Ervin made no effort to stop—is sure to be mentioned when the President confronts the Senator, and, with personal civility and all constitutional respect, tells him where to get off.